

Solomon Williams

Solomon Williams, born in 1819 in Virginia, was to all accounts an ---- extraordinarily inventive craftsmen. After emancipation his smithing abilities allowed him to negotiate a separate and more favorable contract than the other workers. He was probably the Solomon Williams who created the well drill displayed at Oakland (although it could not have been contrived in 1822, as family lore contends). It is possible that the well drill was constructed by his father also Solomon Williams and that the family was bought from Virginia together. One indication that this might be the case comes from his descendants. His great-granddaughter recalled that William Smith, Solomon's son, spoke only French. If Solomon had been bought as a young adult from Virginia, he would have spoken mostly English at home with his family. However, if he was bought as an infant or child he would have been reared in the French culture of Natachitoches Parish.

In any case, Solomon Williams who remained part of the Prudhomme work force well into the 1880's was an exquisite craftsman whose handiwork can be seen throughout the Big House. He also created the iron crosses retrieved from a Freedmen's Cemetery at Oakland. A marker for his beloved wife Laide is among them. They both died in the late 1880's, but their children, including Eugene Williams, continued to work at Oakland.



Although Solomon William's son William Smith used his ingenuity to leave, he had many of the same traits were displayed in his father, who chose to stay. Solomon William's own story shows the inventiveness, creativity, and

industriousness displayed by many black workers even within the confines of enslavement, tenancy and segregation. In 1867, he struck a deal to do the plantation blacksmithing throughout the year at \$2 per day."¹

1. Oakland Plantation, Its People Testimony by Anne Malone
pp. 74-77, 113-115, 117-120